

Madam Chair/Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Kacee Lawlor, and I am here to speak in favor of Bill No. 6777, "An Act Requiring the Installation of Automatic Fire Extinguishing Systems in New Residential Buildings". I am a graduate from the University of New Haven Fire Protection Engineering program, and work full-time as a Fire Protection Engineer in Branford, CT. But just because I have a fire protection background and spend my day protecting others from fire, doesn't mean I'm invincible.

On the morning of January 14, 2015, my boyfriend, Chris, went down to the basement of our home, grabbed his duck hunting gear and left to hunt on the last day of the season. An hour later, I went downstairs to grab clothes for work out of the dryer. I drove the 45 minutes to work, got to my desk and began my day not knowing that a few hours later, our lives would change forever.

I was notified of a possible structure fire at the intersection of Route 12 and Crystal Lake Road. That was the intersection where our house was located. Trying to remain calm and not jump to conclusions, I heard there were flames showing through a basement window. Well, we had a basement. It was OUR house that was on fire. I couldn't leave work quick enough.

I got a hold of Chris to find he had just gotten home and was watching the firefighters break windows and extinguish a fire in OUR home. Imagine standing outside your burning home, listening to the sounds of breaking glass and doors, knowing that you had worked so hard to make it yours, and now it's all ruined and you can't do a thing about it but watch in absolute shock.

I got back to the house by 10:45. I had left a little over four hours prior. I expected to come home from work that night to our little 900 square foot cape, exactly how we had left it, make dinner, watch a little television and carry on our normal day-to-day routine. Instead, the intersection was blocked with emergency vehicles. There was water running down the street, both of the doors to our house were forced, all the windows were broken, and firefighters were everywhere. We heard the fire had started in the basement and everything we had down there was destroyed to a melted, charred, unsalvageable mess. The floor joists were charred through. We lost the majority of our clothing, the washer and dryer, holiday decorations, furniture, tools, bicycles, pantry items, lawn care tools, sports gear, small kitchen appliances, Chris' hunting apparel and fishing rods and reels; you name it, we lost it. The fire was contained to the basement but the rest of the house, however, was covered in a layer of thick, black soot and a cloud of smoke.

I was told animal control took our three cats and 9-week-old puppy to the vet to get examined. I rushed to the vet and was told all but one of the animals was in good shape. One of our cats, O'Malley, suffered severe smoke inhalation. When they pulled him out of the house he was covered in soot, had clouded eyes and was limp and lifeless. He was immediately put in an oxygen chamber, given anti-biotics, IV fluids, x-rays, anti-inflammatory medication, and bronchial dilators. They didn't think he would make it.

So, let's fast forward to the end of the day. It's about 6:00pm, we're freezing from standing outside all day, and we've finally been cleared to enter the house. The chaos, for the most part, had subsided. The State Fire Investigator left, the insurance adjusters came and went, and the

only evidence there was a fire in the house were the boarded up windows and shattered glass on the lawn. We went inside and the sight was eerie, to say the least. Our life, exactly how we had left it no more than 12 hours earlier, didn't feel real. It was all covered in glass, destroyed, dirty and black. The house reeked of smoke; so much it was nauseating.

We grabbed whatever clothes we could find that weren't damaged in the fire and went to Chris' parents' house. We washed what we could, and began trying to figure out how to re-build our life. The next week was a blur. We needed to talk to the utility companies, cable company, trash company, dry cleaners, ServPro, private fire investigators, insurance adjusters, our landlord, and, to top it off, O'Malley's prognosis was still up in the air.

It's now 36 days later. O'Malley has luckily made remarkable recovery and is finally home after a three and a half week stay at the vet. Although he is blind and is on anti-seizure medications, he's alive. We still don't have a place to call our own, though, and are trying to figure out what to replace first; it's quite overwhelming when you lose over \$54,000 in belongings and have nowhere to put the replacements. We will never be able to live in that house again.

So we lost some things and racked up an incredible veterinary bill. So what? No one lost their life, and things can be replaced, right? Sure, you can look at it that way, but let's look at it from a different side....

If our house had been equipped with home fire sprinklers, the damage in the basement would have been minimal. The fire would have been contained to the corner where it began. We would have had maybe \$2,000 in loss; not over \$54,000. We wouldn't have had the astronomical vet bill. The entire house would not have smoke damage, our belongings would have been saved, O'Malley would not be disabled, and we would have been able to sleep in our own bed again.

If that's not reason enough for home fire sprinklers, here's another. There was an injury from this fire; our cat. Let me put it this way. If an animal's standard of living has been severely diminished, the owner can make the decision to put the animal down, but you can't do that with a human being. So, on top of the stress having a fire in your home, talking to insurance companies and construction companies and trying to figure out how to move on, you now have the added stress of medical bills and continuing care for a loved one. That's just for smoke inhalation and/or severe burns. Do you really want a loved one to go through that experience and all those medical procedures - some of which seem barbaric at best? What if you or your loved one lost their life? Is there really a price tag on human life? A home fire sprinkler system is an investment, yes, but money should not be the deciding factor. Your life, your property, your belongings and the well-being of your loved ones should be.

We are trying to be optimistic. Things could have been worse for us, yes. It could have happened just a few hours earlier when we were home sleeping. We both could have gotten smoke inhalation. All of the animals could have been injured, or worse. The fire could have extended throughout the entire house. But, I do know, had the home been equipped with fire sprinklers, we would not be in the same situation we are in right now.